Unit .27

Session .04

Jesus Commissions His Disciples

Scripture

Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:4-11

16 The eleven disciples traveled to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had directed them. **17** When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted. **18** Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. **19** Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." … **4** While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. "Which," he said, "you have heard me speak about; **5** for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days." **6** So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?" **7** He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." **9** After he had said this, he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight. **10** While he was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them. **11** They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven."

Intro Options

Main Point:
Jesus commands all of His followers to go and make disciples.

Option 1

Give each of your students an index card or two. On that index card, each student should write down something he or she is waiting for or something he or she is looking forward to. It could be a film coming out, someone visiting, the ability to drive, etc.

Collect all the cards and then have the group line up the cards in order of what students would be most excited about, from least to greatest (it's okay if not everyone agrees). For example, some students might look forward to driving more than they look forward to a sports season, or vice-versa.

See if anyone puts down Jesus' return. If no one does, introduce it. Ask them where Jesus' return would be on their spectrum. Discuss why they should look forward to His return and why they may not. Discuss how they can anticipate His return more. Tell them that in today's lesson, we'll see the promise of Jesus' return emphasized right at His ascension and what we should be doing while we await His return.

Option 2

Your students should imagine they are part of a stage comedy company. Your troupe is going to put on a new vignette: "What to Do While You're Waiting."

Break your students into small groups and have each group come up with a sketch (skit) showing best ways to pass the time (or to hasten or to redeem the time) until the expected thing or person arrives. The funnier the better, though it's okay and good to have some lesson-learning along the way.

Let them prepare and share their skit ideas. See how they suggest (or satirize) people use their time.

Debrief what themes came out across the skits. Point out that in today's lesson, Jesus will give us instructions on how to redeem the time while we wait for His return.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Matthew 28:16-20.

The disciples went to Galilee to see the One they had been waiting for, the One they thought they had lost forever. As Jesus predicted, they worshiped when they saw Him. However, verse 17 also says that some of the disciples doubted.

Jesus wasn't shaken by their unbelief, and He wasn't discouraged. He was focused on the mission He would pass on to His disciples. But before He shared His commission with His disciples, He established the strength behind it—Himself. Jesus received complete authority and power from God the Father.

- **How do we see Jesus possessing divine authority in other places in Scripture? (See Rom. 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:9-10; Phil. 2:9-10; Col. 2:9-10.)**

Jesus has supreme authority. God has exalted Jesus, and His resurrection was further proof of His authority and His power. Here, at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus directed His disciples to go out in the world under His authority. They went and we also go—not on our own authority or in our own strength but with and by the authority of the risen King. When we go out to make disciples of all nations, we are not doing it with our own ability and authority. Although it is our mission, the effectiveness of our discipleship is not a direct result of how much we do. Rather, it's fueled and rooted in who Jesus is and what He's already done. All throughout the Book of Matthew, the authority of Jesus is made clear (7:28-29; 9:6-8; 11:27). In Matthew 28, we see that Jesus' authority is not passive but active. He not only has authority over nature, disease, sin and death, but also His authority compels us to take action to go and make disciples of all nations.

Jesus commissioned His disciples to teach and to baptize people from all nations—hence the reason the passage is often referred to as the Great Commission. Notice that Jesus was clear and direct with His disciples about their mission, making it easy to understand the most important thing moving forward. Therefore, to follow Jesus and obey His commission, we cannot merely know about Jesus, but our knowledge of who He is motivates us to go with Him on mission.

In addition, notice that the command to "go" was not a suggestion. Jesus wasn't telling the disciples that maybe they should go, or they could go if they could squeeze it into their schedules. Jesus used an imperative, a command, an order to be obeyed. Jesus, the risen King, commanded them to go.

- **What fears do you have that could keep you from obeying the mission Jesus has given to us?**
- **How does the reality of Jesus' authority over all of heaven and earth overcome those fears?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus commands all of His followers to go and make disciples.

Matthew 28

18. Jesus' disciples needed to understand the importance of His authority over all things, and this is still important for us to understand today. The reality of His power and authority didn't end with His resurrection or ascension or at the writing of the biblical text. Jesus' kingdom and His authority are eternal. Jesus began this commission with the statement of His authority and then connected it to the command to "go," indicating that the power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him by the throne of grace is the same power available to us to live out this call to go and make disciples of all nations.

19. For the disciples, going would mean being scattered among the peoples and nations of the world, and for many of us, it means the same. Jesus' call is for a multi-ethnic, cross-cultural focus of missionaries that may require leaving home and the known to travel into foreign lands of the unknown. But the Lord didn't tell us here exactly where to go. He didn't demand that we all leave home; He simply said to go and make disciples of all nations.

20. The Great Commission isn't only about evangelism—it's also about discipleship. God promises to finish the good work He began (Phil. 1:6), and He instructs us to participate in that work through learning about and obeying Him. Christians are further instructed to disciple the disciple, and as we see in these passages, no one is exempt from teaching others (Matt. 28:20). We are all called to go and disciple believers in Christ.

At the conclusion of His instructions and commands, Jesus lovingly reminded the disciples (and us) that they will not be alone in their mission: He would always be with them. What began with a declaration of His power and authority, ended with the declaration of His faithful presence to the end of time and then forevermore.

Activity

Your students are to create skits or posters illustrating how it might be different to try to witness from our own meager strength and from the power of the Spirit. Split students into small groups (for skits) or give them materials to make posters. In the first scene, someone will try to witness to Jesus without the Spirit's help; in the second, the person will try to witness to Jesus trusting in the Spirit. After they've shared, debrief what they thought were good examples and what could be better. Discuss specific people with whom they can share the good news of Jesus this week and how they can rely on the Spirit to help them be good witnesses as they speak with these people.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 104, DDG)

Work of the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Christian

The Spirit's work in the life of a Christian begins in the work of salvation in bringing a person to faith in Christ and is continued through the work of sanctification in helping the Christian to become progressively more like Christ throughout the course of his or her life. He also empowers and indwells believers, intercedes on their behalf, and equips them with special gifts for the service of God's kingdom. He is the Comforter to the believer and aids us in properly interpreting the Bible.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Acts 1:4-8.

Without the Holy Spirit, our witness is powerless. This is because witnessing is not just something that the church does; it is something that is done by the Spirit who always goes before the church in our witnessing. Jesus died (and rose again) in order to grant us the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, three thousand people would not have found new life at Pentecost. Without the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul would not have become the most powerful missionary in the early church. And without the Holy Spirit, the gospel would be powerless and the church would be lifeless.

- **How do you see the Holy Spirit making a difference in the life of your church or small group?**

In this passage, Jesus called His disciples to be His witnesses—through the Spirit's power—in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. By extension, Jesus has called us to bear witness about Him to our loved ones, our enemies, those "other" people, and the unknown. This is not merely a task for the pastors and missionaries "over there." This is a task for every follower of Christ regardless of age, education, experience, past background, or present situation. Jesus is not calling us to do this on our own—because we can't. It's only through the Spirit's power that pursuing the Great Commission is even remotely possible.

Read Acts 1:9-11.

Just as Jesus ascended in power and glory, there's a promise here in the passage that He will return in the same manner. And while no one, other than God the Father, knows specifically when Jesus is going to return (Matt. 24:36), it's important that we recognize that His return is imminent and can happen at any time. Perhaps this is why the angels in this passage told the disciples to stop looking up into heaven and instead look forward and live in light of the ascension. It's like they were telling the disciples, "Yes, Jesus ascended, but He is returning and that's what matters!"

The exhortation by the angels seems similar to what Paul wrote in Philippians 3:12-15, specifically the phrase "forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead" (v. 13). Our mission is time sensitive! Jesus will return at any moment, and every day people are dying around the world—including in your city—without having heard the good news of Jesus Christ. Are you living in light of the ascension? Are you living as a future-oriented disciple in anticipation of Jesus' return?

The gift of Jesus' ascension is that all believers are now commissioned and empowered to make disciples of all nations. There is no difference between a pastor, prophet, poet, or plumber in terms of our primary objective in life. We are all called and we are all sent, regardless of where we live or how old we are. Just like His salvation is for all people, so is Jesus' calling to live in light of the ascension because all people—regardless of what they might have done in the past—should submit to His authority as Lord.

- **Like the disciples not knowing God's plan or timing regarding the kingdom, how do you handle the mysteries of life (what is God's plan, how is God working, etc.)?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus commands all of His followers to go and make disciples.

Acts 1

5. While you might not ever deny the existence of the Holy Spirit, have you ever denied the power of the Holy Spirit? Unfortunately, if you've ever neglected the Holy Spirit or simply don't know the Holy Spirit's role in creation, salvation, and mission compared to that of Jesus the Son or God the Father, then you have functionally denied the Holy Spirit's power. The Holy Spirit is as much God as the Son is God and the Father is God. He is Third Person of the Trinity, worthy of being praised and worshiped (see Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 3:17-18).

6. Instead of allowing the disciples to focus on the details of the kingdom, which they couldn't know, Jesus redirected their attention to the task at hand—it was a time for mission. Jesus had laid out the details of His mission for them in Matthew 28: go and make disciples of all nations. Before He ascended, Jesus expounded on the mission He previously shared.

8. "The ordinary people of God, equipped with the Word of God, empowered by the Spirit of God, dedicated to the Son of God, can accomplish the mission of God. Sharing the right message is only half the matter. We must also be personally reliant on the Spirit of God."[1]

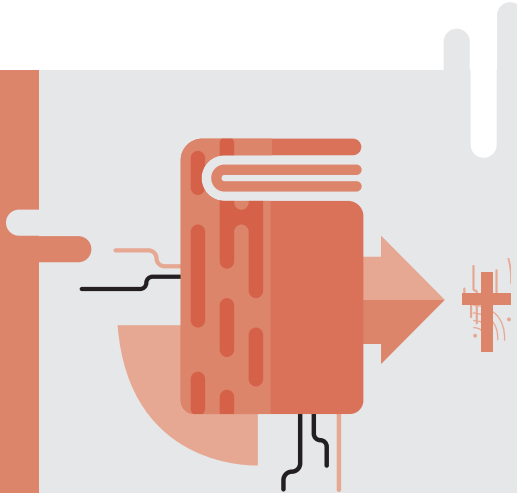
9-11. The fact that the disciples were given the privilege to watch the ascension is one thing, but in God's kindness to them, they were reminded once again that the Father was with them, His promises are true, and Jesus would come again just as He had left. He departed in a cloud, and He will return on the clouds of heaven.

The angels' comforting statement for the disciples also pointed to the form in which Jesus ascended. He ascended in bodily form, scars and all, and He will return as a man coming for His bride, the church.

Remarkably, the God-man will remain fully God and fully man for eternity. He didn't shed His skin upon His return to heaven. Even as He intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father, it is as a man. He continues to relate to us in a glorified state. He had the power to be rid of that body, but in His great love and care for us, He has chosen to be like us in every way, except without sin—for all eternity (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15). And after Jesus' ascension, the angels assured the disciples that Jesus would return again and return in the same form.

(p. 106, DDG) Christ Connection

Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He commissioned His disciples to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. Under the authority of Jesus, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, we make disciples of all peoples as we anticipate the return of Christ.



LESSON 77: SUBMISSION
JESUS COMMISSIONS HIS DISCIPLES

Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:4-11

JESUS COMMISSIONS HIS DISCIPLES

Jesus commands all of His followers to go and make disciples.

JESUS CONNECTION

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LIFEWISE QUALITY

SUBMISSION – Choosing to be under the authority of others.

HEAD

What mission did Jesus give to the disciples?

Whom did Jesus promise to send to the disciples? Why?

HEART

What makes it most difficult to place yourself under Jesus' authority? What would it take for you to be willing to follow His commands in all areas of your life?

What makes it easier to submit to someone's authority? What makes it hard? Why would knowing who Jesus is and what He has promised help us submit to Him more willingly?

HANDS

Jesus told His disciples to "go and make disciples" but also to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came. They obeyed both commands, just not at the same time. When we choose to submit to God and live His way, we will need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us know whether "go" or "wait" is the best response in each situation. Consider the questions below or discuss them with a friend or small group (or in LifeWise).

- Do you tend to be a "Go" person or a "wait" person? Do you want to dive in and get started (take action) or prefer to plan and research first (wait and see)?

- Which option—Go or Wait—is described in the following examples? Was it a good choice? What could they have done better or differently?
  - Joey wanted to apply for a scholarship to a week-long STEM summer camp, but he worked on it so long that he missed the deadline. He asked for more time, but the committee said he would have to reapply for next year.

  - Rebecca's mom told her on Tuesday that a new family had moved to their street and encouraged her to go greet their daughter. On Thursday, Rebecca made cookies and took them to the new neighbors to welcome them.

  - Dante's teacher has a strict "no devices" policy in class. His practice schedule changed for the afternoon, and he decided it was too important to wait until lunch to text his mom. When the teacher caught him, though, he got a detention.